

Session 2 • Consider the Lilies

Matthew 6:25-34

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what "do not be anxious" actually commands, and what it does not. Two keys: the word itself, *merimnao*, to be anxious or pulled by care, and the ground of the command, which is not "nothing bad will happen" but "your heavenly Father knows." Verse 34 shows Jesus is no naive optimist: each day really does have trouble.

Catholic Touchstone. Divine providence: God cares for his creatures concretely and personally, and Christ "invites us to filial trust in the providence of our heavenly Father" (CCC 322, citing this very passage). Trust in providence is not denial of difficulty; it is confidence in a Father inside difficulty.

What You Need to Know

This passage sits in the Sermon on the Mount, immediately after "You cannot serve God and mammon" (6:24) and "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (6:21). The anxiety Jesus addresses first is the anxiety of divided allegiance: a heart trying to secure its own future as if it had no Father. That context keeps the passage from becoming a generic wellness lecture; it is about who is actually holding your life.

The word translated "be anxious" is the Greek *merimnao*, which occurs six times across five verses here (25, 27, 28, 31, and twice in 34: "do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself"). Its standard sense is to be anxious, worried, unduly concerned. It is often linked to a root for dividing, and that is the picture this study will use, though the derivation is not certain and a word's sense comes from its use, not its parts: a self pulled apart, spread across a hundred imagined tomorrows. This exact word family will follow us through the study: Martha is "anxious and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41), Paul writes "have no anxiety about anything" (Phil 4:6), and Peter says to cast "all your anxieties on him" (1 Pet 5:7). Scripture is having one long conversation about one recognizable experience, and tonight we learn its name.

Watch the structure of Jesus's argument. It is not "your fears are irrational." It is a chain of reasons resting on the Father's character: he feeds birds and you are worth more (v. 26); anxiety adds not one cubit (v. 27); he clothes grass that lasts a day (v. 28-30); "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 32). The command "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (v. 33) does not deny needs; it reorders them under a Father who already knows them. And verse 34 is the tell that this is realism, not positivity: "do not be anxious about tomorrow... Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Jesus assumes trouble. He is teaching us to meet it one day at a time, with a Father, instead of all at once, alone.

Be pastorally careful with verse 27 ("which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?"). For a person in an anxiety spiral, "worry accomplishes nothing" can land as one more accusation. Notice how Jesus deploys it: not as scolding, but as release. The weight was never yours to lift. That is the tone to keep all night.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Behind the birds and the daily bread stands the manna. In the wilderness God fed Israel "a day's portion every day," explicitly "that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not" (Ex 16:4); manna hoarded against tomorrow bred worms (16:20). Daily dependence was the curriculum. The psalms sing the same providence over all creatures: "These all look to you, to give them their food in due season" (Ps 104:27), and over anxious strivers: "he gives to his beloved sleep" (Ps 127:2). Jesus's "do not be anxious about tomorrow" is the manna lesson spoken by the Lord of the manna; the group will find Exodus 16 themselves tonight.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Preaching through Matthew, Chrysostom teaches in substance a distinction this passage needs: Christ forbids

anxiety, not work. Labor continues; even the birds go out to gather what God provides. What is forbidden is the gnawing care that acts as if there were no Father, the worry that adds burden without adding bread.

Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, on this passage (commonly Homilies 21-22, though the numbering varies by edition). Tier 2: summary of his teaching.

Our line, not his, if you want one for the room: diligence is a virtue; anxiety is diligence with the Father deleted.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Thérèse's "little way" is the lived form of the trust this verse names: the Father knows. She teaches, in substance, that holiness for the little is not achieving security but surrendering into arms that already hold, and that her confidence rested not in her own strength but in God's merciful love. For the anxious, a Doctor of the Church says: you do not have to be great; you have to be held.

Story of a Soul (Tier 2: summary of her "little way," which draws on the Gospels broadly rather than on this verse in particular).

Our illustration, not hers: the trust of a small child who does not audit the household finances, because her father carries her.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Alphonsus Liguori

Alphonsus teaches in substance that peace is found in uniting our will to God's will in the present circumstance, favorable or adverse, and that the soul which accepts what God permits now is at rest.

Uniformity with God's Will (Tier 2: summary).

Applied to verse 34, in our words: today's trouble, today's grace, today's obedience, and tomorrow left in the hands that hold it, free of the tyranny of an imagined future.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 302-305:** providence, "the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward its perfection"; CCC 305 cites Matthew 6:31-33 by name and asks for *childlike abandonment* to the providence of our heavenly Father.
- **CCC 322:** "Christ invites us to *filial trust* in the providence of our heavenly Father," citing Matthew 6:26-34. (Each paragraph has its own diction; do not blend them.)
- **CCC 2830:** "give us this day our daily bread," the petition of childlike trust in the Father who feeds us. Pair it with **CCC 2834**, which is where the Catechism says plainly that trusting the Father is not idleness: pray as if everything depended on God, work as if everything depended on you.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Tonight the group learns the *merimna* / *merimnao* word family. Do not reveal where it resurfaces: Luke 10:41 appears tonight as a discovery, but Phil 4:6 and 1 Pet 5:7 belong to Session 5, where the word thread pays off ("Scripture has been talking about one thing all along"). If someone with Greek notices early, congratulate them privately and ask them to sit on it.

Sealed question discipline: tonight's steelman ("just stop worrying") walks close to the sealed question. Answer the steelman without ruling on sin. If asked directly whether anxiety is sinful, hold the line: "Session 4."

Session Goals

1. Name the experience precisely: *merimnao*, to be anxious, worried, pulled by care.
2. Trace Jesus's actual argument to its ground: the Father's knowledge and character, not the smallness of the danger.

3. Dismantle the "just stop worrying" reading and the "false comfort" reading at full strength.
4. Recover verse 34 as Christian realism: one day's trouble, one day's grace.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (12 min)
- **0:17** Build: the word, the argument, two discoveries, the double steelman (55 min)
- **1:12** Send (10 min)
- **1:22** Live It This Week and memory verse (5 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** both steelman chains and the Exodus 16 hunt.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Dig Deeper on Ps 127:2, (3) question 5, compressing it into the closing prayer.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

*Father, you feed the birds of the air and clothe the grass of the field, and you know what we need before we ask.
Quiet the noise of our imagined tomorrows. Give us tonight our portion for today:
light for this passage, honesty with each other, and confidence in you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win

W1. What is something you planned and worried over at length that turned out to be a complete non-event? What is something that blindsided you with no warning at all?

W2. Last week we prayed one honest sentence each night. No pressure for details: did anything shift, even slightly, in how the worry sat with you?

Build

Read Matthew 6:25-34 aloud. Then read verse 24 for the doorway: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

1. Jesus says "therefore do not be anxious" (v. 25), and the "therefore" points back at mammon (v. 24). Why would a teaching about anxiety begin with a teaching about masters?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because anxiety about provision can show where security is actually being sought. (Say this carefully: involuntary symptoms are not evidence of divided loyalty, and some people in the room have a condition, not a loyalty problem.) If mammon is master, then my security rests entirely on what I can store, and worry becomes rational: everything depends on me. Jesus relocates security: you have a Father, so your life is not a solo project. The passage is not first about feelings; it is about who is actually holding your life, and the feelings follow the holding.

2. The word translated "be anxious" is *merimnao*, and it lands six times in these ten verses. It is often linked to a root for dividing, which gives us a useful picture: a self pulled to pieces, spread across imagined tomorrows. Where do you see that "pulled apart" quality in verses 25-34? Does the word match your experience of worry?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The whole passage pictures it: life, food, drink, body, clothing, stature, tomorrow, all clamoring at once (vv. 25-31, 34). Anxiety is rarely one thought; it is a crowd. Naming the word matters because Jesus is diagnosing something specific: not planning, not diligence, not caring about people, but the divided, gnawing mode where a person is scattered across futures they cannot reach. Scripture will use this same word family again later in the study; when you hear it, you will know it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "Jesus is teaching an old lesson about bread. Find it in Exodus 16, and come back with three things: the rule God gave about how much to gather, the reason God gives for the rule, and what happened when people kept some for tomorrow." Let them hunt. (They are looking for 16:4, a day's portion every day and the stated purpose of proving them, and 16:19-20, the hoarded manna breeding worms.) Then ask what "do not be anxious about tomorrow" has to do with manna.

3. What was God teaching Israel through one-day bread, and what happens to the lesson when Jesus repeats it on the mountain?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Exodus says it outright: daily portions were a proving, "that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not" (16:4). Daily dependence was the curriculum: trust rehearsed every single morning. Hoarding, the attempt to secure tomorrow apart from God, literally rotted (16:20). On the mountain, the Lord of the manna teaches the same rhythm to his disciples, and earlier in this very sermon he had already taught them to pray for it: "give us this day our daily bread" (6:11). Providence comes with a day's address on it.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Just stop worrying"

Build it at full strength. "Do not be anxious" is an imperative, six times over in ten verses. Commands can be obeyed or disobeyed. The strong version of the objection is not "every anxious feeling is sin," which few would defend; it is this: the imperative must govern something in our power, so voluntarily nurturing distrust, refusing the duties in front of us, or feeding the spiral can be culpable, even if involuntary feelings and clinical symptoms are not. Some in the room have been handed the crude version, possibly in church. Build the serious one anyway; it is the one that survives.

Press, then answer from the text. Watch what Jesus builds the command on: not one syllable of "how dare you," but reasons designed to make trust possible: the birds, the lilies, "your heavenly Father knows" (v. 32). This is a physician putting a crutch under a weak limb, not a judge sentencing it. Verse 34 concedes real trouble is coming; verse 32 relocates the weight. And remember Session 1: the same Scriptures show the sinless Jesus *troubled*. So this much the passage settles: what is commanded is not the instant absence of a feeling. What it invites is a reamed heart: seek first the kingdom (v. 33), and let the Father carry what was never yours. What the imperative asks of the will, where consent, habit, and culpability enter, this session does not settle, and deliberately so: your answer is sealed in an envelope. Session 4.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Birds starve"

Build it at full strength. Now the objection from the other side, and it deserves its full weight: "Look at the birds" is false comfort. Birds do starve. Christians lose jobs, harvests fail, and two millennia of believers have prayed verse 33 and still gone hungry. Providence, the skeptic says, is a bedtime story that survives only in comfortable rooms.

Press, then answer from the text. Jesus never promises the absence of hunger or trouble; verse 34 promises trouble by name. The Sermon on the Mount is spoken by a man heading to a cross, to followers many of whom would face persecution and, in ancient Christian tradition, martyrdom; he is not selling comfort. What he stakes is different: that you have a Father who knows (v. 32), that your needs are seen and never beneath his notice, and that a life ordered to the kingdom is inside his care (v. 33). Be exact here rather than comforting: the Father's care is not a guarantee that no disciple will ever go hungry or die of want. Christian teaching on providence has never promised that, and Christian history would refute it in a page. Providence ordinarily works through creation, through human solidarity, and through the Church, and God can permit deprivation without abandoning the person or losing the end he is bringing them to. Do not call starvation a disguised form of material provision. Note also that the Father's ordinary providence has hands: the Church that breaks bread together (Acts 2:44-46 is where this sermon's family ends up). Providence is not a mechanism that spares us the cross. It is a Father who accompanies us through it, which is precisely what the birds, who neither sow nor reap and are still fed, were meant to whisper.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "One more find. Jesus once said this word, *anxious*, to one specific person, by name, in her own kitchen. Find her." Point them to Luke 10:38-42. Ask what "one thing is needful" adds to tonight.

4. Martha is "anxious and troubled about many things" while doing something genuinely good, welcoming and serving Jesus. What does his answer to her ("one thing is needful") teach that the birds and lilies have not yet said?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That anxiety can colonize even our service of God. Martha's work was good; her scattered, resentful mode of doing it was the problem: "many things" against "one thing." Jesus does not condemn the serving; he re-centers the servant. The needful thing is his presence, the "good portion" Mary chose. Tonight's teaching is not only about money and food; it is about a divided self, and the cure is the same in a kitchen as on a mountain: seek first.

DIG DEEPER

Ps 127:2: "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep." Have someone read it. The psalm does not condemn work (it assumes building and watching as real labor whose fruit still depends on the Lord); it punctures the illusion that outcomes are purchased by our self-torment. Sleep itself, every night, is a small act of trust: the world continues without our supervision.

5. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (v. 33). Practically, in an ordinary week of your life, what does "seeking first" look like when a wave of worry arrives?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let the group be concrete; there is no single script. The shape is a reordering: the worry is not suppressed but demoted, brought under a prior allegiance. Examples worth surfacing: praying before problem-solving; asking "what is today's actual obedience?" instead of rehearsing next month; tithing or generosity precisely when money fear is loudest (dethroning mammon, v. 24); keeping Sunday genuinely for God when work anxiety wants it. Verse 33's promise is not a transaction but an ordering: things hold their right size when the kingdom holds first place.

Send

S1. Which tomorrow are you most often living in? What would it mean, this week, to come back to today, where the manna is?

S2. Who around you is carrying visible "anxious toil"? What could you do this week that quietly lightens it?

Live It This Week

- **Manna rule.** Each morning, ask the Father for what *today* actually requires, by name, and deliberately leave tomorrow's items off the list until tomorrow.
- **Consider the lilies, literally.** Take ten unhurried minutes outdoors this week with verse 26 or 28. Look at actual birds, actual growing things. Let the sermon's visual aids do their work.
- **Keep the nightly sentence** from Session 1 going; you are building a habit.

Memory verse: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." (Matthew 6:33)

Closing Prayer

Father, you know what we need before we ask, and you are not ashamed of us when we forget it.

*Give us this day our daily bread, and the grace to leave tomorrow's bread in your hands.
Set your kingdom first in us, and give your beloved sleep.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Matt 6:25-34	Main text
Matt 6:24	Doorway: God and mammon; anxiety as divided allegiance
Matt 6:21	Leader background: treasure and heart
Ex 16:4, 19-20	Live Discovery: manna, a day's portion; hoarding breeds worms
Matt 6:11	Answer 3: daily bread petition
Luke 10:38-42	Live Discovery: Martha, anxious and troubled; one thing needful
Ps 127:2	Dig Deeper: bread of anxious toil; he gives to his beloved sleep
Ps 104:27	OT Roots: all creatures look to you
Acts 2:44-46	Steelman answer: providence with hands, the sharing Church
Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7	Leader background and Thread Watch: where the <i>merimna</i> family returns (Session 5)